

Document Name	Social Media Guidance 2014
Effective Date	31/7/14
Date for Review	July 2015
Version Number	1
Approved by (CMT/JCC/Council/Committee)	JCC 31 July 2014
Responsible Business Manager	Tracey Mellors

Social Media Guidance 2014

1. Introduction

Newark and Sherwood District Council is committed to making the best use of all available technology and innovation to improve the way we deliver our services. This includes using all reasonable and cost-effective means to improve the way we communicate, reach out and interact with the different communities we serve.

2. What is Social Media?

Social media is the term commonly given to web-based tools which allow people to interact with each other in some way – by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests online. As the name implies, social media involves the building of online communities or networks to encourage participation and engagement.

This includes social networking websites such as **Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn**, content sharing websites such as **Flickr, YouTube, Instagram and Pinterest** and many other similar online channels and blogs.

These platforms open up many new and exciting opportunities. However, the practical application of such technology by Councils' is still in its early years and there are a number of potential issues to consider.

These guidelines aim to provide managers and individual employees with information to consider before participating in or developing any new social media application and to help you get the best out of the tools available whilst maintaining a safe professional environment and protecting yourself as well as the organisation.

3. Personal use of Social Media

As a Council employee it is important to be aware that posting information or views about the Council cannot be isolated from your working life. Any information published online can, if unprotected, be accessed around the world within seconds and will be available for all to see.

Remember you are **personally responsible** for any content you publish. This includes anything that you forward via email or re-post to your profile. People tend to interpret having the 'right' to express themselves online as implying a lack of consequences when they say inappropriate things. That's not the case; you have to take responsibility for what you write, and exercise good judgment and common sense.

Always remember you are **personally responsible** for any content you publish. You can take a number of steps to protect yourself:

- Understand your online **privacy** settings. You can do this by checking your settings and understanding who can see your personal information and the information you publish;
- Be aware of and follow the Council's **Employee Code of Conduct**;
- Be aware of and follow the Council's **ICT Policies**;

- Ensure you do not conduct yourself in a way that is detrimental to the Council or that could bring the Council into disrepute;
- Take care not to allow your interactions on social media sites to damage working relationships between yourself and colleagues / service users. Under no circumstance should offensive comments be made about the council, councillors, customers, or colleagues on the Internet. This may amount to cyber-bullying or defamation of character and could be treated as a disciplinary offence;
- Do not let your personal use of social media interfere with your job and always access it in your own time.
- Keep your personal social media accounts separate from any Council accounts.

4. Using Social Media for work purposes

Access to social media sites is already open. **HOWEVER**, before you start using social media for work purposes, you will need to speak to your line manager and the Communications Team to discuss why you want to use it, what benefits it will bring to the Council and which platform is best for you. Your Business Manager will need to complete a new user request form to authorise your access by which is available here and on the intranet.

[New social media user request form.pdf](#)

Social media can have many benefits for Councils'. However, although it tends to be a lot less formal than traditional communication methods, using social media does not allow for the 'rule book' to be thrown away; the same legal and moral constraints apply to online communications as they do to traditional methods such as newspapers, adverts, and emails.

Always remember that when you take part in online discussions your comments are permanently available and open to being republished in other media.

All of the Council's social media accounts tend to be closely followed by the local newspapers, radio and TV so please be aware that your posts may attract media interest in you and/or the Council

To gain the maximum value from these tools, you should look to foster relationships and therefore you will need to acknowledge and understand the commitment and investment of time in building and developing sustainable online relationships with people. Before you start ensure that you have the resources available to undertake your activity.

Some business units may want to use social media for tracing individuals. Before doing so please contact external communications for guidance

To gain the maximum value from social media tools you need to create relationships with other people using the tools. This may involve following somebody and sharing their news and advice or regularly monitoring the social media channels so that you can always respond to queries promptly. It will mean keeping up to date with current news and events, joining in discussions and adding your opinion to popular topics. Building strong on-line relationships in this way requires a considerable commitment of time and resources. Before you start please ensure that you have this level of resource in place.

There are a number of tools that can help you manage your social media activities, including the 'dashboard' tool Hootsuite. Hootsuite is very useful for managing multiple social media sites and allows you to easily schedule messages into the future. It is a useful tool for

managers who wish to monitor multiple social media accounts within a business unit. For more information on Hootsuite please contact the Communications Team.

As an employee, you must take the following into consideration when using social media:

- You are **personally responsible** for any content you publish so be mindful that it is in the public domain and on the record for a long time.
- The Council has **ICT policies** in place to protect you and to protect the organisation. Make sure you are familiar with these policies before you start to use social media.
- Ensure **passwords** adhere to the ICT password protocol and where shared passwords are used ensure they are changed if a member of staff with access leaves.
- Understand your online **privacy** settings – the Communications Team can assist with this. For example, you should know how to remove a post or block an unwanted follower.
- **Be professional** - make sure you are always seen to act in an honest, accurate, fair and responsible way at all times. Anything you publish will reflect directly on the Council as a whole.
- Be aware of your **language and conduct**. The rules governing staff conduct such as the **Equality and Diversity** policies still apply. Also, as in all publishing, you should be aware of issues such as libel, defamation and slander.
- **Stay legal** - always stay within the legal framework and be aware that data protection and financial regulations apply.
- **Try to add value** - Provide worthwhile information and perspective. The NSDC brand is best represented by its staff and what you publish will reflect on the wider organisation.
- **Purpose and outcomes** - Make sure you think through why you are using social media and what outcome you wish to achieve. For example, if you are inviting public responses then think through how you manage the incoming information, how you will make use of the results and how this fits in with other forms of consultation. Ask yourself: is social media appropriate for this activity? Is there a data protection issue? There may be if you are collecting personal information for example.
- **Assess any risks** - think through any potential risks and make sure you have plans in place to manage them. For example it is always sensible to have more than one member of staff involved with social media to cover for holidays and sickness.
- You may wish to **use the corporate social media** accounts that are already well established in the local community and are regularly checked. The Communications Team can update Twitter, Facebook, Flickr and Youtube on your behalf and are always happy to broadcast your news!
- Decide **how often the social media sites will be checked /updated** and be clear about whether you intend to respond out of normal office hours. See the Council's social media page on our website for more guidance on this <http://www.newark-sherwooddc.gov.uk/news/socialmedia/>
- **Respect copyright** when linking to images or other online material and always ensure you have the **correct permissions for photographs** before publishing or sharing.
- The communications team keep a **control log** of all user names and passwords for Council social media accounts so make sure they are aware of all new accounts / changes to accounts.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation

You will need to evaluate whether the time you are spending on using social media justifies the results. It's useful to make sure you have a plan for how you intend to monitor and evaluate the success of your social media activity. This may involve for example recording the number of twitter followers you have, how many requests you receive, how many re-tweets you get or how many Facebook likes you have.

The Communications Team is available to provide advice on evaluating and monitoring your social media activity and there are a number of free monitoring tools available to help with this such as **twazzup.com**, **topsy.com** and **social mention**.

The Communication Team already carry out periodic monitoring of all social media mentions on behalf of the Council as a whole as well as keeping an eye on the hyper-local sites within the district. All business units may wish to monitor what is being said about them on-line.

6. Social Media Training

As with all new initiatives, if you believe that you require social media training please identify this during your next staff appraisal.

7. NSDC Social Media Accounts

Please visit the social media page of the Council's website for an up to date summary of the social media accounts we currently use. <http://www.newark-sherwooddc.gov.uk/news/socialmedia/>

8. Leaving the Council

If you manage a social media account such as LinkedIn on behalf of the Council, the intellectual property, content, contacts and information contained within or obtained through the account will remain the property of the Council after you have left us.

9. How to do it well – when doing it for work purposes.

Do...

- Choose the right platform for your audience
- Choose an appropriate username or account name so people can find you
- Be friendly. Don't use 'Council speak' or excessive jargon. Imagine you are speaking (politely) to a friend.
- Be real. Social media comes to life when the people following you can see the real life elements.
- Be light hearted, and fun, if appropriate.
- Add value by posting photos, video or sound clips. Make sure they're appropriate and you have the relevant permissions.
- Update it regularly. People will get bored and switch off from you if you don't update regularly. You should not underestimate the time needed to maintain an effective presence in your chosen social media site!
- Link in with other Council social media work. This will help to 'cross-sell' services and you may attract new people to your activity.
- As well as using social media to communicate your own news also use it to keep informed, pick up new ideas, and share.
- Ask for advice. We've got some experienced social media users at the Council so don't go it alone, contact the Communications Team before you start anything.

- Ensure that there is a clear 'return path' for people to enquire or respond to your information. This may be a telephone number, e-mail address or web link.
- Understand the restrictions of your chosen tool. For example twitter restricts you to 140 characters; if you wish people to "retweet" your information allow space for this to occur.
- Understand the conventions and language used by your chosen tool. For example how to retweet or favorite a post.
- Be professional. Be Responsible. Be credible. Most importantly never say anything that you cannot substantiate.
- A good standby reply is '**Thanks for your tweet / post – I'll pass on your comment**'.

Don't...

- Don't venture into the world of social media unless you can devote enough time to keep it up to date.
- Don't do it just because you think you should.
- Don't conduct yourself in a way that brings you or the Council into disrepute.
- Don't include contact details or photographs of service users or staff without their permission.
- Don't use your personal account for work purposes unless discussed and approved by your line manager in advance.
- Never share confidential or sensitive information. You should know and follow the Council's data protection guidelines.
- Never get into an argument with someone or inflame a situation. Sometimes it is best not to respond at all! (for example to an argumentative post) If you are unsure contact your line manager or the Communications Team for advice.

Remember...

- You are **personally responsible** for any content you publish.
- Whatever you publish is in the public domain and on record for a long time.
- You can attach your work social media feed to your smartphone providing you have a **pin code** protecting your phone. Be aware that linking a feed to your personal phone does have pitfalls – it's very easy to mistake your work account for your personal account!
- Be wary of comments that are political or made by politicians. Don't get into a political issue without seeking advice and support first.
- Be professional. Make sure you are always seen to act in an honest, accurate, fair and responsible way at all times.

And finally...

- You will need to have a contingency plan in case you are on holiday or are off sick. Let your manager know what that contingency is.
- You will be expected to provide log in details to, and/or give administrator rights to, the Communications Team for contingency, business continuity and security reasons.
- You will also be expected to close down the account, or transfer your access rights to an approved colleague, should you leave the authority or move on to another area of work within the Council.
- **Don't underestimate the time you will have to put in.** Social media takes effort and time. To be of any value it has to be regularly updated. It also needs to be monitored every day, sometimes several times a day, to ensure there are no inappropriate or

offensive contributions from the public. If there are, and they are not dealt with immediately, this can very quickly spiral out of control and result in negative publicity. Don't underestimate how quickly things spread online. Some Council's have experienced this already.

- **Report any mistakes quickly.** Alert your manager and the Communications Team early if you think you may have made a mistake.
- **Report any controversial or malicious comments from other people quickly.** Always alert your manager and the Communications Team early if someone else posts something political/rude/sensitive/controversial/malicious - together we'll make a decision on how we respond.